

THE CURSE OF
THE HOHENZOLLERN

*Uniform with this
Volume*

**THE MURDER OF
NURSE CAVELL**

By

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THE CURSE OF THE HOHENZOLLERN

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THE CURSE OF THE HOHENZOLLERN

I

ROYALTIES MADE IN GERMANY

IT has become a trite and hackneyed claim of the Prussian megalomaniacs that they are an imperial people, a Super-Race predestined by Nature and Providence to the domination of the world. The claim seems so ludicrous that no serious publicist would think it worthy of a moment's discussion. It can only be dismissed with derision and contempt. It certainly seems a grotesque claim to assert on the part of a people who in

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their political and social life have shown themselves a pre-eminently *servile* people, who have ever been cringing to their superiors, who never produced one single leader of free men, one Cromwell, one Mirabeau, one Gambetta, who always believed in the virtue of passive obedience, who always submitted to the policeman rather than to a policy, who always obeyed a prince rather than a principle, who, as recently as the end of the eighteenth century, allowed themselves to be sold like cattle by Hessian princelings, who never rose to defend their most sacred rights, who never fought a spirited battle in a righteous civil war, and who have always been ready to fight like slaves at the bidding of a heavy-booted, sword-rattling despot.

And yet, in one very important respect, the Germans may rightly claim

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that they are actually ruling the European world. German princes are actually seated on almost every throne of Europe. The French language may still be the language of diplomacy; but the German language, which was still a despised lingo to Frederick the Great, has become the language of European royalties. Germany for two hundred years has done a most thriving and most lucrative export trade in princelings. One Hohenzollern prince ruling in Roumania is asserting German influence in that Latin country. At this very moment, another Hohenzollern prince ruling in Athens, nicknamed "Tino" by his affectionate relative the Kaiser, is stultifying the will of his people who are determined to join the cause of the Allies. Another German prince ruling in Sofia, who four years ago was mainly responsible for the

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horrors of the second Balkan war, is now trying to compel the Bulgarian nation to betray the cause of Russia, to whom the Bulgarian people owe their political existence and their liberation from the yoke of the Turk.

Even yet public opinion does not realise to what an extent European princes in the past have been made in Germany. We speak of the Royal House of Denmark as a Danish House. As a matter of fact, the Danish House is in real fact the German dynasty of Oldenburg. We speak of the House of Romanov as a Russian dynasty. And it is true that the founder of the dynasty, Michael Romanov, the son of Philarete, Archbishop of Moscow and Patriarch of All the Russias, was a typical Muscovite and was called to the throne in 1611 in troubled times by the unanimous voice of the people. But,

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as all the Czars of Russia for two hundred years have only married German princessess *without one single exception*, the Russian dynasty has become in fact a German dynasty. No doubt as the result of this war the Russian dynasty has found itself again. Even though German influences are still very strong at Petrograd, the Russian ruler himself has shaken off alien influences and has revealed himself as a true leader of his people. He is showing that the Russian spirit is more powerful than German blood. But the fact remains, so far as mere heredity is concerned, that Nicholas II., through the German marriages of all his ancestors, is of German stock exactly to the extent of $\frac{63}{64}$'s *and of Russian stock only in the proportion of $\frac{1}{64}$.*

II

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HOHENZOLLERN DYNASTY

OF all the German dynasties seated on the thrones of Europe, the Hohenzollern stand out, not merely as the most powerful but also by far the most striking and the most interesting. The Hohenzollerns are as unique in the history of royalty as the Rothschilds are unique in the history of finance. The history of other dynasties has been largely a history of court scandal and intrigue, providing inexhaustible material to the petty gossip of court chroniclers. We are all familiar with the amorous episodes of

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Louis XIV. and Louis XV. with the mysteries of the Grand and Petit Trianon and of the Parc aux Cerfs, with Madame de Maintenon and Madame de Montespan, with Madame de Pompadour and Madame du Barry, that beautiful courtesan who on the scaffold so pathetically asked the executioner : “Mr. Hangman, I beseech you, do spare me.” We are all familiar through Thackeray’s “History of the Georges” with the *chronique scandaleuse* of the Hanoverian dynasty. No doubt the Hohenzollerns also have had their *chronique scandaleuse*, and have also attracted the prurient curiosity of memoir writers. The Court of Berlin in the days of the polygamist king, Frederick William II., the successor of Old Fritz, was the most dissolute court of Europe, as Berlin is to-day the most depraved city on the Continent.(1) But

(1) See Appendix;

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somehow the scandals of the Hohenzollern seem to be irrelevant episodes. Somehow we do not think of the annals of the august house as a history of scandal. We only think of the Hohenzollern as the political necromancers of modern Europe, as the supreme masters of state-craft. The very name of the Hohenzollern recalls to our minds a race of State builders. Machiavelli selected the House of Borgia to illustrate the principles of the state-craft of the Renaissance. A modern Machiavelli would have to go to Potsdam to study the philosophy of high politics.

From the beginning, the Hohenzollerns have been identified with the Prussian State. Louis XIV. said of himself : " L'état c'est moi," but Louis XIV. was an exception in modern French history. On the contrary, every Hohenzollern could have applied to

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himself the words of the Bourbon King.

If we take each individual Hohenzollern, we find the most obvious differences between them. No dynasty more strikingly illustrates that psychological and political peculiarity of royal houses, which may be called the law of opposites and which has almost the regularity of a universal law, a law according to which each ruler is the living contrast of his predecessor. The successor of the Great Elector, Frederick I. (1688-1713) the first King of Prussia, was an extravagant fop who spent a year's income on the ceremony of coronation. On the contrary, his successor, "Fat William" (1713-1740) the Sergeant King, was a miser who on his coronation only spent 2227 thalers and 9 pence where his father had squandered over six millions, a maniac

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who collected tall grenadiers as other kings have collected pictures, who tortured his children and who wanted to punish with a death sentence a juvenile escapade of the heir to the throne. Frederick the Great (1740-1786) again was the antithesis of Frederick William I. and loved literature and art as intensely as his father detested them. Frederick William II. (1786-1797), the successor of the great realist and woman-hater, was a polygamist and a mystic. Frederick William III. (1797-1840) was an exemplary husband and a well-meaning business-like bourgeois. He was succeeded by Frederick William IV. (1840-1861), a romanticist and a dreamer who ended in madness. William I. (1861-1888) was an honest, straightforward, methodical, reasonable, self-controlled soldier. Frederick III. was

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an idealist and, like Frederick the Great, a lover of literature and art. William II. has bewildered the world as a versatile and omniscient dilettante, warlord and peace-maker, Mohammedan and Christian, always a comedian yet always in earnest. And we all know how the heir to the throne is the reverse of the Kaiser, how his sinister humourⁱⁱ contrasts with the religious enthusiasm of his sire and how this Crown Prince with the fancies of a degenerate has deserved to be called the "Clown Prince" of the German Empire.

It is therefore apparent that if we analyse the characteristics of every one of the nine dynasts who have reigned in Prussia since the Great Elector for the last two hundred and fifty years, we do not find one single ruler who resembles his predecessor or

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his successor. Yet all these Hohenzollern, whether capable or incapable, whether mad, half-mad or sane, whether profligate or domesticated, whether extravagant or miserly, have certain common traits. They have all been inspired with the same dynastic policy. When we consider the individual variations from the family type there can be here no question of physical heredity like the lip of the Hapsburg, or the tainted blood of the Spanish Bourbons. It is a question of political environment, a question of dynastic tradition. Indeed we must carefully study that Hohenzollern family tradition of politics if we want to grasp the full significance of the word, if we wish to understand how such a dynastic tradition may become a formidable power to European history. Maeterlinck, in his "Life of

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the Bee," has an eloquent and profound chapter on what he calls the "Spirit of the Hive." In the domestic and international policy of the Prussian State, in the Hohenzollern dynastic tradition, we discover such a collective spirit, the Spirit of the "Prussian Hive," the evil spirit of war-mania and megalomania, the treachery, the brutality, the greed, and above all the predatory instinct dignified into the name of Real Politik. And Europe will only enjoy permanent peace and security if she succeeds in destroying that Hohenzollern tradition, that sinister spirit which lives in the wasps' and hornets' nest of Berlin, that spirit which has "potsdamized" Europe, and which has debased the moral currency of European politics.

III

LANDMARKS IN HOHENZOLLERN HISTORY

NO one would call the political history of Germany an interesting history. It is only the history of free nations or the free play of spiritual forces that is of abiding human interest, and the history of Germany is neither the history of a free people nor the conflict of spiritual forces. That history is so intolerably tedious that even the magic of Treitschke's genius has not been able to relieve its dullness and that before the war no British or French publisher dared venture on a translation of Treitschke's masterpiece. But, if the

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political history of Germany has all the tedium and monotony of parochialism, on the contrary the personal history of the Hohenzollern is intensely instructive. One would hesitate to call it romantic. One would refrain from applying such an epithet to those sober, calculating, relentless realists. Yet there is an element of romance about them, the romance of business, the interest which attaches to the rise of a family from the humble obscurity of a petty princeling to the power and prestige of world rulers, the same kind of interest which belongs to the life story of Mr. Vanderbilt or Mr. Carnegie. What a progress those Hohenzollerns have made from the distant days when they left their little Swabian southern home of Zollern between the Neckar and the Upper Danube, the cradle of their dynasty.

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Nomen, omen! Does not the very sound of the word *Hohen-zollern* suggest and inspire high ambitions? And does not the very name of that little village of Zollern, which is apparently derived from Zoll, suggest that all the world was henceforth to pay a zoll or *toll* to the dynasts of Hohen-Zollern?

And what a strange succession of incidents! In themselves those incidents may seem insignificant. They left little trace in the chronicles of olden times. Yet those petty incidents have proved decisive events in the annals of modern humanity. We see those events happening from generation to generation without any apparent connection. Yet somehow they all made for the aggrandisement of the family. We see successive princes acquiring through marriage and inheritance possessions in scattered and

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remote outposts of the Holy Roman Empire. Yet somehow all those outposts became eventually milestones on the highway to greatness. One ancestor becomes Burgrave of Nuremberg: a considerable promotion! A subsequent Burgrave of Nuremberg lends money to a needy Austrian Emperor and becomes in 1417 Elector of Brandenburg: a much more considerable promotion! Again another ancestor inherits at the other extremity of Germany the petty dukedom of Cleves, and that dukedom becomes the nucleus of Prussian power in the Far West of Germany. Still another ancestor of a collateral branch becomes Grand-Master of the religious Order of the Teutonic Knights, and this fact induces Master Martin Luther, who was much more of a realist and a time server and a trimmer than theologians

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give him credit for, to advise that Hohenzollern Grand-Master to secularize his knights, to confiscate the whole Church property of the Order and to make himself the Overlord of Eastern Prussia.

Thus everything has worked for the aggrandisement of the future Kings of Prussia. Everything has brought grist to the mill of Sans-Souci. As Mr. Lavissee in his admirable monographs on the Hohenzollern dynasty has pointed out, all those events seem a string of disconnected and meaningless *accidents*. It was an *accident* that a needy Emperor should have applied for a loan to the Burgrave of Nuremberg just when the Electorate of Brandenburg happened to be vacant. It was an *accident* that a remote Hohenzollern relative should become Grand-Master of the Teutonic Order.

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It was an *accident* that the Duke of Cleves and the Duke of Prussia should both only leave daughters. These accidents might not have happened. Or they might have produced entirely different results. One certainly does not understand why they should have produced the momentous results which they did produce, why they should all have served one great political purpose, the historical vocation and mission of one dynasty, why they should all have been landmarks in the imperial progress of the House of Hohenzollern.

IV

A DYNASTY OF UPSTARTS

NO dynasts in modern times, not even the Bourbons nor the Hapsburgs, have been more obsessed with the pride of race. A double avenue of gaudy statues in Berlin has been erected in the Siegesallee, or Alley of Victory, to illustrate the glories of the House. And Carlyle in his "History of Frederick the Great" devotes a whole volume—and a very tedious volume—to the mediæval ancestors of the dynasty. The present Kaiser believes himself to be the lineal successor, not only of the Hohenstaufen but of the Cæsars of ancient Rome.

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It was in that spirit that he was graciously pleased recently to dedicate a monument to his predecessor, Emperor Trajan! *Traiano Romanorum Imperatori, Wilhelmus Imperator Germanorum!*—To Trajan Emperor of the Romans, William Emperor of the Germans!!

But all that Hohenstaufen-Hohenzollern genealogy is mythical history. The real history of the Hohenzollern is of recent date, and begins in 1640 with the advent of the Great Elector (1640-1688). Compared with the ancient House of Hapsburg or of Bourbon, the Hohenzollern may well be called the "Parvenus" of Royalty. Until the seventeenth century the Electors of Brandenburg were twice vassals—lieges of the Holy Roman Empire and vassals of the Kings of Poland. And when in 1701 the first

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Hohenzollern King promoted himself to royal rank and ascended the throne, he made ceaseless and humiliating attempts to secure recognition. The old Houses refused to accept his title and would not acknowledge the upstart royal "brother."

But the very fact that the Hohenzollern are the "Parvenus" of European royalty has spurred them on to more strenuous endeavours and to still higher ambitions. Their sole endeavour was to raise their position—*sich considerable machen*, as the Great Elector said in his quaint pidgin German. They were not born to the royal dignity. They had to make it. They were not accepted as kings. They had to assert themselves and to impose their claims. The good sword of Frederick the Great asserted his claims with such results that except

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Napoleon no ruler ever since has disputed the right of the Hohenzollern to rank amongst the dynasts of Europe.

V

PRUSSIA AS AN UPSTART STATE

EVEN as the Hohenzollern are an upstart dynasty so the Prussian State may be called an upstart State. It has not, like France, Great Britain, or Spain, two thousand years of history behind it. Until the end of the Middle Ages, Christian civilisation was bounded by the Elbe. The Prussian populations were the last in Europe to be converted to Christianity, and recent history has proved only too conclusively that the conversion never struck deep roots. Until the end of the Middle Ages, the religious and military Order of the

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Teutonic Knights had to wage war against the Prussian heathen, and the magnificent ruin of Marienburg, the stately seat of the Teutonic Knights, still testifies to the achievements of the Order. Marienburg is the only historic city of Prussia, Berlin is but a mushroom growth of modern days. Whilst London and Paris go back to the beginning of European history, Berlin only three hundred years ago was a mean village inhabited by Wendish savages.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that Prussia is not a nation, but a State, and that State is an entirely artificial creation. France and Great Britain are the slow and natural growths of many centuries. They have definite geographical boundaries, their people have common traditions, common ideals, common affinities.

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The Prussian State is made up of a heterogeneous mosaic of provinces, the spoils of successive invasions. What holds together the artificial fabric of the Prussian State are only the dynasty, the bureaucracy and the army. The bureaucracy and the army are to Prussia what the civil service and the British army are to the Indian Empire. Suppress the British army and the civil service, and British rule ceases to exist. Suppress the Hohenzollern dynasty, the Prussian bureaucracy and the Junker army, and the Prussian structure crumbles to pieces.

Nature has been niggardly to Prussia. Everything has had to be made with the hands of man. Brandenburg, Pomerania, Western and Eastern Prussia are dreary wastes. Berlin is an oasis of brick and stone amidst a Sahara of sand. The provinces of old

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Prussia have few industrial resources. The very soil had to be made by intensive agricultural methods. The very population had to be imported. Modern Prussia is neither the gift of Nature nor the outcome of history. It is the triumph of human statecraft. It is the achievement of the "Will to Power." When that "Will to Power" relaxes, the Prussian State collapses.

VI

THE PRUSSIAN STATE IS NOT A GERMAN STATE

THE modern Holy German Empire is born of the unholy nuptials of the German people with the Prussian State. But the paradox is, that the Prussian State which claims the right to rule the German States, who themselves assert their right to rule over Europe, cannot even pretend to be German. The contrast between the German and the Prussian has often been pointed out. The Southern and Western German is still to-day as he was in the days of Madame de Stael, artistic and poetic, brilliant

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and imaginative; a lover of song and music. The Prussian remains as he has always been, inartistic and dull and unromantic. Prussia has not produced one of the great composers who are the pride of the German race; and Berlin, with all its wealth and its two million inhabitants, strikes the foreigner as one of the most commonplace capitals of the civilised world. The Southern and Western German is gay and genial, courteous and expansive; the Prussian is sullen, reserved and aggressive. The Southern and Western German is sentimental and generous; the Prussian is sour and dour, and only believes in hard fact. The Southern and Western German is an idealist; the Prussian is a realist and a materialist, a stern rationalist who always keeps his eye on the main chance. The Southern

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and Western German is independent almost to the verge of anarchism ; he has a strong individuality ; his patriotism is municipal and parochial ; he is attached to his little city, to its peculiarities and local customs ; the Prussian is imitative, docile and disciplined ; his patriotism is not the sentimental love of the native city but the abstract loyalty to the State. The Southern and Western German is proud of his romantic history, of his ancient culture ; the Prussian has no culture to be proud of.

That contrast of temperament between Prussians and Germans corresponds to a difference of race. The Prussians are not really Teutons. They are alien intruders. The Prussians, the Pruzi or Pruteni are Lithuanians. The population of Brandenburg is Slav. Berlin, Brandenburg,

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or Brannybor, are Slav-Wendish names. The ruler of the Grand Duchy of Mecklenburg, a State which is even more Prussian than Prussia, and which is a strange survival of feudalism, bears until this day the name of "Prince of the Wendes."

Century after century the Burgraves of Brandenburg and Kings of Prussia had to attract colonists to their dreary dominions. The recruiting sergeant went out all over Europe to fill the ranks of the Prussian army. One-third of Frederick the Great's army was made up of foreigners. Frederick the Great on his accession found himself at war with the Prince-Bishop of Liège, because that worthy prelate would not allow his subjects to be impressed by the Prussian press-gang. Prussian colonising agents scoured the neighbouring countries for agricultural

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labourers, foresters and artisans. Twenty thousand Bohemians were imported by the Sergeant King. In the eighteenth century, by far the most important element introduced into Prussia was of French origin. The majority of the French Huguenots of the lower classes were attracted to Prussia. The population of Berlin, which was only 6,000, was doubled by the French exodus. The very language spoken at Berlin was a savoury mixture of French and German. *Ein plus machen* meant in the language of the Grand Elector to have a surplus revenue. To express his ideal of kingship, the Elector said: *Ich stabilire die souverainete auf einen rocher von Bronze.* *Dem Regiment obligat* expressed the obligation of military service. At the accession of Frederick the Great, out of a population of 2,400,000, 600,000

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were refugees. It is one of the most impressive instances of historical retribution that modern Prussia should thus have been built up with the assistance of French exiles, and that modern France should have been crushed by the descendants of the French Protestants who were expelled by the bigotry of Louis XIV.

The colonisation of Prussia has proceeded until this day. Before the war immigration into Germany was exceeding the emigration. Polish labour continues to migrate to the Eastern provinces. Hence the odious expropriations of Polish land in the district of Posen. The ablest literary and industrial and political talent from all parts of Germany has been attracted for generations to the Prussian capital. Prussian jingoes claim for Prussia the credit of every administrative improve-

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ment, of every political achievement of modern Germany. As a matter of fact, the Prussian State has achieved little by itself. Its originality is never to initiate but skilfully to exploit the creations of others. It is a safe rule to assume that every statesman or leader who has made an original contribution to Prussian history is not of Prussian origin. The greatest philosopher of Prussia, Kant, was a Scotsman. Her greatest statesman, Stein, was a Westphalian. Of the two greatest Prussian generals, one, Blücher, was a Mecklenburger; the other, Moltke, was a Dane. The national historian of Prussia, Treitschke, is a Saxon of Bohemian descent.

VII

PRUSSIA AS A MILITARY STATE

THAT colony of many heterogeneous populations is, above all, a military State, a *Kriegstaat*. It was created through war, and has been organised for war. In the eighteenth century the whole of Prussia was one vast camp and barracks. The King of Prussia is primarily the *Kriegsherr*, or war-lord. The ruling caste of Junkers is a caste of warriors. The very *schoolmasters in the eighteenth century were nearly all recruited from the invalided non-commissioned officers*. Historians single out Fat William, the Sergeant King, as the supreme type

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of the Martinet King. But it is not only Fat William, but all the Kings of Prussia who have been martinet kings and recruiting sergeants. Prussia has made war into an exact science. Prussia has created the "nation in arms."

Geographical conditions and the ambitions of the Hohenzollern have combined to make war a permanent necessity. Prussia was a "mark" or frontier land, and the margraves or mark-grafs were the earls and protectors of the Mark. The frontiers of Prussia were open on every side. She was surrounded by enemies. George William, the father of the Great Elector, during the Thirty Years' War tried to maintain neutrality. He soon found out that neutrality did not pay, and his territory was overrun by hostile bands. Pomerania was oc-

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cupied and retained by the Swedes; Poles, Russians and Austrians in turn invaded the country. After the battle of Kunersdorff, in 1761, Prussia was at her last gasp, and Frederick the Great found himself in so desperate a position that he had resolved on committing suicide. Again, after Jena, Berlin was occupied by the French, and for five years remained under the yoke. Insecurity has been for generations the law of Prussian existence. The Prussian State has known many ups and downs, and has passed through many tragic vicissitudes. They managed to turn geographical and military necessities to the advantage of their dynastic ambitions. What was at first commanded by the instinct of self-preservation became afterwards a habit, a tradition and a systematic policy. They discovered that the best way to

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maintain an efficient defensive was to transform it into a vigorous offensive. They discovered that the best means of living safely was to live dangerously. They discovered, in the words of Treitschke, that the one mortal sin for a State was to be weak.

VIII

PRUSSIA AS A PREDATORY STATE

NOT only is Prussia a military State, it is also a predatory State. All the Great Powers of Europe have been, in a sense, military States. But to them all war has only been a means to an end, and often a means to higher and unselfish ends. The Spaniards were a military nation, but their wars were crusades against the Moor. The Russians have been a military nation, but their wars were crusades against the Turks or wars for the liberation of the Serbians, the Bulgarians, and the Greeks. The French

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have been a military nation, but they fought for a chivalrous ideal, for adventure, for humanity. Even Napoleon's wars of conquest were really wars for the establishment of democracy. The Corsican was the champion and the testamentary executor of the French Revolution.

The peculiarity of the Prussian State is that it has been from the beginning a predatory State. The Hohenzollern have ever waged war mainly for spoliation and booty. Not once have they waged war for an ideal or for a principle.

The German Kaiser delights to appear in the garb of the mediæval knight. He wears three hundred appropriate uniforms. A German wit has said that he wears the uniform of an English admiral when he visits an aquarium, and that he dons the uniform of an

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English field-marshal when he eats an English plum-pudding. Amongst those three hundred disguises, there is none which is more popular in Germany than that of the Modern Lohengrin bestriding the world in glittering armour. The Kaiser lacks the democratic gift of humour, and does not seem to be aware of the incongruity of the Lohengrin masquerade. A Prussian King cannot honestly play the part of a knight in quest of the Holy Grail. Chivalry and Prussianism, the crusading spirit and the predatory spirit, are contradictory terms.

The most exalted Order of the Prussian Dynast is the Order of the Black Eagle. The Hohenzollern could not have chosen a more fitting emblem than that of the sinister bird of prey. For they have been pre-eminently the men of prey amongst modern

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dynasts. Every province of their dominions has been stolen from their neighbours. They secularised and stole the Church property of the Teutonic Order. They stole Silesia from Austria. They acquired Posen by murdering a noble nation. They stole Hanover from its lawful rulers. They stole Schleswig-Holstein from the Danes. They wrested Alsace-Lorraine from the French.

Circumstances in modern times seem to have singularly favoured their designs of conquest. To outward appearance they were threatened by powerful enemies, but those enemies looked far more formidable than they appeared. On the far western boundary, the feeble ecclesiastical princes of Cologne, Treves and Mayence ruled over the smiling fields and vineyards of the Rhine provinces. On every side

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Germany was broken up into petty principalities. The Holy Roman Empire of Germany, which was neither Holy, nor Roman, nor German, and which had ceased to be an Empire, was only the shadow of a great name. Austria was perpetually distracted by internal and external dangers. Poland was an unruly republic. The very weakness of their neighbours was a temptation to the Hohenzollern.

The one redoubtable enemy to the Hohenzollern dynasty was Russia. But after the disastrous defeat of the Seven Years' War inflicted by Russian arms, Prussia learned to control by deceit and policy a power which she dared not challenge, and could not hope to overcome, on the battlefield. From the middle of the eighteenth century, Prussia concluded a dynastic alliance with the Russian dynasty.

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The Hohenzollern liberally provided their Russian brethren with German princes and princesses. The Prince of Holstein, who became Tsar Peter III., was the first German prince of the Romanov dynasty. The little Cinderella Princess of Anhalt-Zerbst, the future Catherine the Great, was the first of an uninterrupted line of German princesses. The Teutonic barons of the Baltic provinces for one hundred and fifty years were able to control the Russian foreign policy. Nesselrode for forty years was the Foreign Minister of the Tsar, although he only spoke German and did not know a word of Russian. Nicholas I. and Alexander II., with unswerving loyalty, supported the interests of their Prussian brother-in-law and nephew.

On two occasions the Russian Tsars actually saved the Hohenzollern from

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complete destruction. In 1761, when Russian armies occupied Berlin, an apologetic Tsar begged to be forgiven for daring to vanquish his illustrious cousin. In 1807, at Tilsit, Prussia was only saved from dismemberment through the quixotic intervention of Tsar Alexander I. And the Russian Tsar proved so powerless against Prussian intrigues that, although Alexander I. had concluded a close alliance with Napoleon, the German-Russian Court at St. Petersburg boycotted Napoleon's ambassador, Savary, and eventually succeeded in breaking the Franco-Russian Coalition.

But the Hohenzollern did not only wage a predatory war for conquest and spoliation. Their methods have been as predatory as their aims. War to them was not merely a policy. It was a business, and often a lucrative

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business. In the Middle Ages, war had been largely a trade. A huge commerce in prisoners was transacted, and an enterprising Italian condottiere would often recoup himself through the ransom of one single rich prisoner. The Prussians have continued those mediæval methods until this day. *Treitschke* lays it down in his "*Politik*" that war must be made to pay and need not exhaust a Prussian Treasury.

The poor Belgians to-day are learning to their cost the full meaning of those Prussian predatory methods. The Prussian invaders are extorting millions of money, as well as enormous food supplies, from a starving people. They are dislocating whatever remains of the internal trade. They are breaking up thousands of miles of Belgian railways, and they are sending them to the Polish theatre of war. But,

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brutally as the poor Belgians have been treated, one shudders to think of the cruelty and the greed of the Prussian in the new conquered Russian territories and of the pitiful plight of the Poles and the Lithuanians.

IX

PRUSSIA AS A FEUDAL STATE

PRUSSIA in her fiscal and commercial policy may be called a typical modern State. The Hohenzollern have been compelled to utilise all the resources of commerce and industry, not because they are liberal or progressive, but merely in order to increase the national revenue, in order to provide for an ever-swelling military expenditure. On the contrary, in her political constitution, Prussia has remained a mediæval and feudal State. She is the Paradise of the Junker. But Prussian Junkerthum is not merely a squirearchy of independent

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landowners. Mr. Bernard Shaw, in his "Common sense About the War," in which one ounce of common sense is mixed with nine ounces of nonsense, would make us believe that there is little difference between German Junkerthum and British Junkerthum, and that there is little to choose between the English Junker, Sir Edward Grey, and a Pomeranian squire. Mr. Shaw must have studied Prussian conditions to very little purpose when he makes so ludicrous a comparison. To call such a quiet, silent country gentleman, such a law-abiding Parliamentarian as Sir Edward Grey, to call even him a typical Prussian Junker is a travesty of the facts. A more striking contrast to the complete Junker of Pomerania than the "Complete Angler" of the Foreign Office could not well be imagined. The glorified Prussian

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Junker is Bismarck. The typical Junker is Prince Blücher. A perfect modern type is that fiery Freiherr von Oldenburg, who advised the Kaiser to send a troop of Uhlans, as in the old Cromwellian days, to clear out the politicians of a disloyal Reichstag.

The Prussian Junkers are the lieges of the war-lord. They are all the more loyal to the throne as they are poor, and therefore dependent on the King for their very subsistence. There are few large estates in Prussia and they yield but a meagre revenue. The relations of the Junkers to the Hohenzollern are the relations of William the Conqueror to his companions in arms. They originally held their broad acres, their *Rittergut*, by military tenure. Some of their feudal privileges have gone, but they continue to be the leading political power in the State

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under the Kaiser's Majesty. They are the pillars of the throne. They owe military services. To recall the words of the Sergeant-King, they are "*dem Regiment obligat.*" And they are rewarded for their military services by privileges innumerable. They are the controlling influence in the Landtag, which is a representative assembly only in name. They occupy the higher posts in the civil service and in the diplomatic service. In each district the Landrat is the supreme authority, the electioneering agent of the Government, and the representative of the Prussian King.

And the Junker caste have been as selfish, as rapacious, as their Hohenzollern over-lords. Nothing could be more sordid than their attitude in the recent campaign for financial reform. They have shifted the burden of

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taxation upon the weaker shoulders of the peasant and artisan. They have compelled Von Bülow to reverse the Liberal Free Trade policy of Caprivi, and to impose heavy corn duties, merely to increase their own rents.

X

PRUSSIA AS A DESPOTIC STATE

IN a military State like Prussia, which is mainly organised for war, where war is the vital function, not only does the King hold his power by the Divine right of the Sword, but even in times of peace all political power is concentrated into his hands :
“ *L'état c'est moi !* ”

In such a State a Parliamentary Government is an absurdity, and, as a matter of fact, there is no Parliamentary Government, neither in Prussia nor in the Empire. There is no responsible Cabinet. The Chancellor is accountable not to the majority of the

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Reichstag, but to the Kaiser. The Germans imagine that because they have the fiction of universal suffrage, they possess the most democratic Government in Europe. And an enthusiastic German triumphantly reminded me of the fact at a mass meeting which I recently held in San Francisco on behalf of the Allies. I reminded him that Bismarck himself has given us in his "Memoirs" the Machiavellic reasons which induced him to invent the fiction of universal suffrage. The man of blood and iron tells us that he only adopted universal suffrage as a temporary device to convert the German States to the Prussian policy, and as a means of influencing the people against the federal dynasties.

The Reichstag is essentially different from a British House of Commons.

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As a political body it is the most contemptible assembly in Europe. It is a mere debating club, a convenient machine to vote the Government taxes. And even the power of voting has been largely taken from it. It has become part of the German constitutional practice that the military estimates must be passed without discussion. It is only considerable increases of the army and navy which have to be submitted to the Reichstag, and those increases are generally voted for a number of years. In 1887 a characteristic episode happened. Bismarck had decided on formidable additions to the army, and he wanted those additions voted and guaranteed for seven years. The military "Septennate Law" frightened even a docile Reichstag, and the Catholic Party refused to vote it. Bismarck, who for

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ten years had fought the Pope, and who had thundered against the interference of a foreign ecclesiastical potentate in temporal matters, now asked the Pope to interfere in favour of the Army Bill. To the discredit of the Papacy, Leo XIII. fell into the trap. Leo XIII. exerted pressure on the Catholic Party. But they still were recalcitrant. Bismarck and the Pope proved equally persistent. Finally, at the behest of the Iron Chancellor and with the assistance of the Vicar of Christ, the Reichstag passed that fatal military law, which was the beginning of the colossal European armaments, which were to increase the political tension of Europe until breaking point, and which was to result in the present catastrophe. Thus is Parliamentary Government carried on in the Empire of the Hohenzollern !

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Passive obedience and discipline are the cardinal virtues inculcated by the Hohenzollern. "*Verboten*," "*Nicht raisonniren*," are their watchwords. A Hohenzollern brooks no opposition. "*Wir bleiben doch der Herr und Koenig und thun was wir wollen*," said the Sergeant-King. And two hundred years after, the Kaiser expresses the same imperial sentiments: "*Wer mir nicht gehorcht, den zerschmettere ich*" ("Whoever refuses to obey, I shall smash.") Bismarck, who created the German Empire, was dismissed like a lackey. Baron von Stein, who reformed the Prussian State, and who stands out as the greatest statesman of his age, was ignominiously dismissed. Ingratitude has always formed part of the Hohenzollern code of royal ethics.

We are told by the apologists of the

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Hohenzollern that the same discipline, the same obedience to duty, are practised by the rulers themselves. "*Ich Dien*" is the Hohenzollern motto. Of all the servants of the Prussian State, there is none who serves it more loyally, more strenuously than the King of Prussia. "I am the Commander-in-Chief and the Minister of Finance of the King of Prussia," said the Sergeant-King of himself. How often have the Prussian Kings been held up as shining examples of devotion to duty! Behold how hard a Hohenzollern King has to work for the State! In the same way the business man who rules his staff with a rod of iron might say to his discontented workmen: "See how strenuously I labour for the success of the business!" The workmen would probably answer that the ceaseless toil of the business man is not

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wholly disinterested, that the millionaire manufacturer is not a philanthropist; and the apologists of the Hohenzollern might be reminded that a King of Prussia in every generation has been wont to work mainly for himself.

XI

THE HOHENZOLLERN AS THE CHAMPIONS OF PROTESTANTISM

TREITSCHKE urges as one of the chief claims of the Hohenzollern that they have been in modern Europe the champions of the Protestant religion and at the same time the apostles of toleration. Is not the Kaiser the supreme head of his Church and the Anointed of the Lord? Does not he still preach edifying sermons to his soldiers and sailors? And does he not at the same time extend his imperial protection over believers of every creed?

The truth is that the Hohenzollern

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have never been the champions of Protestantism, but have astutely and consistently exploited it for their own purposes. They did espouse the Lutheran and Calvinistic faith, but their conversion enabled them to appropriate the vast dominions of the Church, a spoliation which might have presented some difficulties if they had remained Catholic. We saw that, during the Thirty Years' War, during the supreme crisis of Protestantism, William George, Elector of Brandenburg, remained neutral and allowed the Northern hero, Gustavus Adolphus, and Cardinal Richelieu to champion the cause of the Protestant religion.

Not only did the Hohenzollern not defend the Protestant religion; they perverted it and debased it by subjecting it to the Prussian State. Such subjection is the negation of Protes-

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tantism, as it is the negation of Christianity. Christianity in a political sense has always meant the separation of the spiritual and the temporal powers. It is the essence of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism that it actually does protest. It is of the essence of Nonconformity that it refuses to conform. Prussian Protestantism has ceased to protest, and conforms to whatever is demanded by the State. The Lutheran parson is the obedient servant of the Hohenzollern. "*Cujus regio illius religio*": spiritual allegiance must follow temporal allegiance.

The ultimate outcome of the confusion of spiritual and temporal powers in Prussia has been that Prussia has become the Atheist State, and it is because the Prussian State is an atheist State and absolutely indifferent to the interests of religion, that it has come to

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practise in its own peculiar way the political virtue of toleration. As the Prussian wars of conquest had brought together many heterogeneous populations professing different religions, toleration became a vital necessity for the State. It is not a virtue of the dynasty and the Hohenzollern certainly deserve no credit for it. The Prussian doctrine of toleration has always been of a negative and conditional kind. Prussian kings have adopted the religious theory of Gibbon. All religions are equally true to the believer. They are equally true to the unbeliever. *They are equally useful to the State.*

All religions have proved equally useful and have been exploited with equal indifference by the Prussian dynasty. The attitude of Frederick the Great to religion is characteristic of the Hohenzollern attitude. Frederick

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the Great was surrounded by a band of French, Swiss, and Scottish atheists. His main relaxation from the cares of State was to bandy cynical and obscene jests on Christianity with the Table Round at the private supper-parties of Potsdam. But his royal hatred and contempt for all positive religion did not prevent him from cordially inviting the Jesuits to his dominions because he found them useful pedagogues to teach and conciliate his newly conquered Polish subjects. It is one of the paradoxes of history that the same religious order which had been suppressed by the Pope and expelled by the Catholic Kings of France and Spain was protected by the Atheist King of Prussia and the Atheist Empress of Russia. According to the same opportunist Hohenzollern tradition, Bismarck in turn fought the Pope,

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imprisoned bishops and cardinals and then used the influence of the Pope and the hierarchy to further his Machiavelian policy. Even so in more recent times the Kaiser appeared at one and the same time as a devout pilgrim to the Holy Land, as the special friend of Abdul Hamid—Abdul the Damned—and as the self-appointed protector of three hundred million Mohammedans.

XII

HOW THE GERMAN PEOPLE WERE SUBJECTED TO PRUSSIA

WE have analysed the principles which ever directed the Prussian State. We have described the characteristics of the Hohenzollern dynasty who created that Prussian State. How is it that the German nation should have surrendered their destinies to a power which is so constitutionally selfish, so inherently evil, which has trampled down all the principles that a modern world holds dear and sacred ?

The subjection of Germany to Prussia has been a triumph of Hohenzollern

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diplomacy and deceit and has been the outcome of a tragic misunderstanding on the part of a politically uneducated and inexperienced people. The German people were tired of their political impotence, of their miserable dynastic quarrels, of their abject subservience to their parasitic princelings. The German people, broken up in a hundred petty states had the legitimate and praiseworthy ambition of becoming a united people. German unity had been for generations a cherished dream of German patriots. History had abundantly proved that the Austrian Empire could not assist in the realisation of that dream. Then came the opportunity of the Prussian tempter. Prussia offered her mighty sword. Prussia alone had the military power and a strong political organisation. The German States yielded to

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the temptation. They trusted that, in concluding an alliance with Prussia, they would retain their liberties. Indeed they hoped that once German unity was realised, Germany would assimilate and absorb the Prussian State. Alas! It was the Hohenzollern State which was to annex and subject the German Empire. Little did the Germans know Prussian tenacity. Little did they know the rapacity of the Black Eagle. Still less did they know the black magic of the necromancer Bismarck.

Treitschke reminds us in his *Politik* of an incident which is characteristic of the relation of the German Empire to Prussia. On one occasion, even Bismarck, the Prussian Junker, expressed a misgiving that a particular law would not be acceptable to the Federal States of the Empire. Em-

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peror William contemptibly dismissed the objection. "Why should the Federal States object when they are only the prolongation of Prussia?" Treitschke, the Saxon, accepts the Prussian theory of Emperor William. He tells us proudly that the Federal States have ceased to be independent States, indeed, that they have lost the essential characteristics of a State, that they are only called States by courtesy, that there is only one State in the German Empire and that all the other Federal communities only continue their precarious existence by virtue and with the consent of the Hohenzollern dynasty.

It is one of the most appalling misunderstandings of history. Like Faust, the German people have sold their soul to Mephistopheles: Bismarck. And they have sold it for

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power. They are now paying the price. As in the wonderful old ballad of Burger, the Prussian horseman has taken the maiden "Germania" on his saddle. The death's-head hussar has carried her away on his wild career through space until he has brought her to the gates of Hell.

It has thus been the fate of the German nation, as of other European nations, to work and fight for the aggrandisement of the King of Prussia. A section of the people, the Social Democrats and the Liberals, have made fitful and impotent efforts to free themselves from the tyranny of the Hohenzollern. What they have not succeeded in doing, Europe is now doing for them. In the fullness of time, Europe has arisen to crush the Hohenzollern, to kill the "Spirit of the Prussian Hive." The war will

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result in the enfranchisement of Germany as it will result in the enfranchisement of Poland and Serbia. Did the history of the world ever present so tragic a paradox? Twelve million heroes are fighting the German Government. Millions of the manhood of the civilised world are laying down their lives on all the battlefields of Europe and all the high seas of the world, mainly in order to make the German people free.

XIII

JUDGMENT ON THE HOHEN- ZOLLERN STATE

IN 1807, after the crushing defeat inflicted by Napoleon on the Prussian armies at Jena, when the Military Monarchy crumbled to pieces in one day like a house of cards, Joseph de Maistre, the most profound and the most prophetic political thinker of his age, wrote the following significant lines from St. Petersburg. To realise the full significance of the judgment, one must remember that Count de Maistre was a fanatic supporter of the old monarchic order. He hated Napoleon with a bitter hatred, but he hated Prussia more :

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“ Ever since I have started to reason, I have felt a special aversion for Frederick II., whom a frenzied generation has been in a hurry to proclaim a great man, but who was really no more than a *great Prussian*. Posterity will consider this Prince as one of the greatest enemies of the human species that has ever lived. His monarchy which had inherited his spirit had become an argument against Providence. To-day that argument has been converted into a tangible proof of eternal justice. This famous structure built with blood and mud, with debased coin and base libels has crumbled in the twinkle of an eye.”—(*De Maistre, Lettres et Opuscales*).

Those words were written exactly one hundred and seven years ago, and the world is once more anxiously looking forward to another Jena which will

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deal a final blow to the Hohenzollern monarchy. When that catastrophe comes, Europe, enlightened by the awful experiences of the last hundred years, and delivered from the black magic of the political necromancers of Potsdam, will unanimously echo the prophetic judgment pronounced by Joseph de Maistre. For to-day, even more than in 1807, Prussia has become an "argument against Providence." Even more than in 1807 the Prussia of 1915 "is built with blood and mud." Even more than in 1807 the chastisement of Prussia is demanded by "eternal justice." The whole civilised world will breathe more freely when the sinister and diabolical power will be broken for ever and will oppress and degrade humanity no more.

APPENDIX

THE PRIVATE MORALITY OF THE PRUSSIAN KINGS

FREDERICK WILLIAM II.—THE HOHEN- ZOLLERN POLYGAMIST

BY ALBERT SOREL

IT is generally assumed, even by those writers who are most strongly opposed to the sinister policy of the Hohenzollerns that at least their domestic relations present an edifying contrast with the private immorality of the other Royal Houses of Europe. The world has been made familiar with the Court scandals of the Hapsburgs, the Bourbons, and the Georges, and has heard little of the Hohenzollern dynasty. But that is merely because the "amours" and the family squabbles of the Hohenzollerns are so much less picturesque and so much less interesting than those of a Henry IV. or of a Louis XIV., and because they have been hidden under a thick cloud of hypocrisy.

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The most brilliant of French historians, Monsieur Albert Söfel, has torn the veil from this hypocrisy and has laid bare the sordid story of Frederick-William II.

As an illustration of the manner in which the official historians of Prussia have narrated the history of the dynasty, it is instructive to compare the following character-sketch of the successor of Frederick the Great with the idealist portrait of Treitschke (*German History* Vol. I.), who would make us believe that Frederick-William II. was a paragon of all the private virtues.

Frederick the Great's base tolerance produced dissolvent effects. Not proceeding from respect of religious beliefs, it engendered contempt for them. As, apart from the curb of religion, the new society of Prussia had no tradition of social morals to rely upon, corruption entered in and consumed it. The King's scepticism took possession of his subjects, who translated it into deeds. It was good "form"; everyone in Berlin took it up and conducted himself accordingly. The leaven of licence and sensuality which mars all the literature of the century fermented without let or hindrance in those coarse souls. An immature civilisation

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had overstimulated imaginations and senses without abating the brutality of the primitive passions. In Prussia people lacked the delicate taste, the genteel habits, the light wit which in France qualified the depravity of the age. A heavy dissoluteness was paraded in Prussia. Officials, the gentry, women, all fed their minds on d'Holbach and La Mettrie, taking their doctrines seriously and applying them to the very letter.

Add to this that in the newly-built Prussian capital society, utterly artificial as it was, an improvised amalgam of incongruous elements, was predisposed, so to speak, to dissoluteness. Berlin swarmed with army men who had no family life and whose whole day was not occupied with military duties. Men of letters, adventurers of the pen and of the sword, attracted by Frederick's reputation and reduced to intrigue and all sorts of expedients for a living ; a nobility, very poor, very proud, very exclusive, weighed down by royal discipline and thoroughly bored ; a bourgeoisie enlightened, enriched, but relegated to a place of its own ; between these groups, separated one from the other by etiquette or prejudice, a sort of *demi-monde* where they met, chatted and enjoyed themselves at their ease, the *foyer* of "French ideas," the hub of affairs and intrigues—Jewish society,

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the richest and most elegant in Berlin. With the marvellous pliancy of their race the Jews had assimilated the new civilisation and took their revenge from the political exclusion of which they were the victims by bringing together in their *salons* all the intellectual men in Berlin, all the attractive women, all desirous of liberty and freed from prejudice. Such was Berlin in the days of Frederick.

II

One of the finest cities in Europe, wrote Forster in 1779, but the Berliners! Sociability and refined taste, he found, degenerated in them into sensuality, into libertinage (he might almost say voracity), freedom of wit and love of shining in shameless licence and unrestrained debauch of thought. The women in general were abandoned. An English diplomat, Sir John Harris, afterwards Lord Malmesbury, had the same impression: Berlin was a town where, if *fortis* might be translated by "honourable," you could say that there was not a *vir fortis nec femina casta*.

If you consider that outside Jewish homes money was scarce and that temptations are all the stronger the less means you have of satisfying them, you can see why in many minds dis-

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order of ideas and corruption of morals opened a new wound, the most dangerous, in sooth, and the most repugnant in nations—venality. Mirabeau, in his "Secret History," indelibly recorded all the vices of "ce noble tripot," Berlin. On this head his famous pamphlet is a picture in violent colours, but true nevertheless. Cynicism there seems merely local colour. "Rottenness before Ripeness—I am very much afraid that must be the motto of Prussian power. . . . What cannot money do in a house so poor?"

III

It required Frederick's hand of iron to set in motion these complicated springs, to regulate the unwieldy machine, keep together these elements collected with no little ingenuity and ready to go to pieces. But that hand was weighty and hard. There were signs, in the upper classes at all events—the only classes then taken into account—of a sort of muffled revolt against this implacable disciple. Besides, the Prussians entertained queer illusions as to the future. Frederick had deceived his subjects just as he had deceived himself regarding the durability of his work. They did not understand to what an extent their power was

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the personal power of their King. Proud to the point of infatuation of the rôle he had made them play, they imagined it was their own doing, and that Frederick's soul would survive in them. They expected from a new reign the same glory abroad, the same security at home, the same relative prosperity, with a yoke less rough and a discipline less severe, not understanding that the very roughness of the yoke and the severity of the discipline were conditions necessary to the duration of the work. The mercantile protective system, which had built up industry; the administration of taxes, which poured money into the State coffers; the economy, which immobilised this money in the treasury, hampered and irritated all who wished to work and trade, all who reflected on the natural conditions of commerce and industry; but it was these things alone that enabled the poorest Government in Europe to be better armed than the richest, and to keep in the van. In a word, people wanted the spring to relax, and failed to see that to slacken the spring meant annihilating the State.

IV

To reform Frederick's monarchy would have required no less genius than it took to create it.

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Reform, however, was indispensable, since Frederick alone was capable of holding up the composite edifice he had built. Hence a threatening and well-nigh inevitable catastrophe "All will go on almost of its own accord, so long as foreign affairs are quiet and unbroken," wrote Mirabeau after Frederick's death. "But at the first gunshot or at the first stormy situation, the whole of this little scaffolding of mediocrity will topple to the ground. How all these underling Ministers would crumple up! How everyone, from the distracted chief to the convict-gang, would shout for a pilot! Who would that pilot be?"

Frederick's nephew, who was called upon to succeed him, was not made for so great a rôle. In every respect he offered a complete contrast to the prince whose weighty heritage he took up. Frederick in person was infirm and sober; all his prestige lay in the gaze of his great eyes, which, as Mirabeau put it, "at the will of his heroic soul, carried fascination or terror." Frederick-William II. was a *bel homme*, highly sanguine, very robust, fond of violent exercise and coarse pleasures. "The build and strength of a Royal Guardsman," wrote the French

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Minister, d'Esterno, who had no liking for him. "An enormous machine of flesh," said an Austrian diplomat who saw him at Pillnitz in 1791. "The true type of a king," according to Metternich, who was presented to him in 1792 at Coblenz, at the time of the German crusade against France and the Revolution. "His stature," he added, "was gigantic, and his corpulence in keeping. In every company he stood a head higher than the surrounding crowd. His manners were noble and engaging." He expressed himself with a certain effort, in little abrupt phrases. There was nothing in him to recall the implacable and sovereign irony of Frederick.

"His look," said one apologist, "does not betoken a man of genius, but German candour shines on his brow." Strange candour, scarcely recognisable if you take the word in its common and proper sense. It must be taken, as was then the practice in Germany, through translations of Rousseau, in the equivocal and refined acceptance which reconciled innocence with indecency, virtue with every disorder of the imagination and the heart. Ecstatic and sensual, devout and licentious, a prey to violent appetites, tormented by scruples, superstitious and bebauched believing in ghosts, with a tendency towards cabal, Frederick-William had a taste for ethics

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and a feeling for religion. He spoke of them with respect, with awe, with emotion. In his case it was a natural penchant and at the same time a pose, the attitude of every heir-presumptive towards the crowned head, a way of winning admiration and captivating by force of contrast.

VI

He and those around him might be gulled by this "German candour." Not so Frederick. In his Memoirs he draws his nephew as he was in 1765 at the age of twenty-one, at the time of his first marriage with Elizabeth of Brunswick: "The young husband, without any morals, given over to a life of debauchery, was daily guilty of infidelity to his wife. The princess, who was in the flower of her beauty, was shocked at the slight regard shown for her charms. Soon she plunged into excesses almost as bad as her husband's." In 1769 they were divorced. Frederick-William married a princess of Darmstadt. The second marriage was no happier than the first. The princess did not retaliate, though she did not lack incentives to do so. The prince lapsed back into his dissolute habits. Apart from many passing fancies, he had a recognised mistress-in-chief. This person, who managed always to retain the favour, if not the

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love of Frederick-William, was the daughter of a humble musician. She married the prince's valet-de-chambre, became Madame Rietz, and was afterwards made Countess of Lichtenau. Frederick-William by the first marriage had had a daughter, Princess Frederica, who was brought up by the Queen, the discarded, not to say repudiated wife of Frederick the Great. The father, when visiting the girl, fell in love with one of her maids-of-honour. Her name was Mademoiselle de Voss, and she came of a good house, being cousin to one of the King's Ministers, M. de Finckenstein, and sister of a President of the Chamber. "This beauty, who to my mind is very ugly," wrote Mirabeau, "is a mixture of prudery and cynicism, of affectation and ingenuousness; she has a natural wit of a kind, some schooling, manias rather than desires, a gaucherie which she strives to cover by an appearance of *naivete*. . . . All her charm lies in her complexion, and even that I find wan rather than white; a very beautiful neck. It was this mixture of unique licence, they say, which she combined with the airs of innocent ignorance and vestal severity, that captivated the prince."

VII

Frederick-William was one of those complex libertines who find in clever resistance a whet to their passion and a solace to their scruples. The siege of Mademoiselle de Voss lasted nearly two years. The outs and ins of this strange romance were the common talk of the Court. It had not yet reached its dénouement when Frederick the Great's death stopped its course for several weeks. King from August 17th, 1786, onwards, Frederick-William seemed to forget everything but affairs of State. But Mirabeau affirms, after September 8th, "the fervour of the novice began to abate." Mademoiselle de Voss, he added, was on the point of yielding. The King, to make her comfortable, had set up an establishment for his daughter Frederica; Mademoiselle de Voss did the honours. The year passed, however, without the vestal's surrendering. She loved the King, but the honour of the family still weighed more with her than love. She set rigorous conditions to her capitulation: a left-handed marriage, the written consent of the Queen and the removal of the titular mistress, Madame Rietz. On this last point the King was inflexible; he gave in on the other two.

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The Queen gave her consent with the stipulation that there should be no real divorce or public separation ; she kept her title of Queen and her position as lawful wife. The rest, it appears, was of no great interest to her. It only remained to conclude the marriage, but, under the circumstances, that was a delicate and ticklish business.

By hook or by crook a precedent had to be found : the Prussian Consistory proved amenable, and authorised the marriage. The marriage was celebrated in July, 1787, in the Chapel Royal of Charlottenburg. Mademoiselle de Voss took the title of Countess of Ingenheim. Her happiness was short-lived. She died in the month of March, 1789. All Berlin is in mourning, wrote M. d'Esterno. "The Countess of Ingenheim is cruelly regretted by the people, the royal family, and even the Queen, much less for the person of the said Countess as because of the increase of credit which her death will bring to Dame Rietz, the old habitual mistress, who is said to be very avaricious and a great intriguer."

VIII

The literature of the day shed tears over the Royal bereavement, celebrated the "virtues" of this susceptible monarch and contrasted with

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the withering scepticism of Voltaire and the criminal frivolity of the French' the tender abandon with which Frederick-William gave himself up to "nature's sweetest inclination." "Women-haters," wrote Baron de Trenck, "have been the scourges of humanity. The King of Prussia has a great soul, full of sensibility; in love he is capable of a tender attachment: he knows the value of his mistress. Supposing he gives her a million, the money is divided among the members of the household who are citizens. He will not rob an honest man of the spouse who constitutes his happiness, he will not sacrifice Rome for Cleopatra. He wants to please all by himself. For twenty months he courted Mademoiselle de Voss, he married her, he was faithful to her, he wept over her ashes. Every citizen wise enough to know human weaknesses must wish that if he made a fresh choice it would fall on an object as worthy of his heart. So let him enjoy a happiness which belongs to the simple peasant as it does to kings." This hypocritical twaddle, this licentious casuistry, was "very good style" in Germany then, and was highly appreciated.

IX

The distraction which Trenck desired for the afflicted soul of the King was not long in presenting itself. In 1790, on the anniversary of the Countess of Ingenheim's death, Mademoiselle Doenhof was presented at Court. Everyone there was busy consoling Frederick-William. A claimant had even been put forward in the person of a young lady called Viereck, a friend of Mademoiselle de Voss, who had taken the latter's place with Princess Frederica. Unhappily for Mademoiselle Viereck's friends, she was dark and in no way recalled the dear departed. Mademoiselle Doenhof, on the other hand, was, according to the French Minister, "so perfectly fair that while pretty in artificial light, in daylight she was as yellow as a lemon." With the same charms as Mademoiselle de Voss, she had the same jumble of pietism and virtue. It was once more a case of marrying. The King saw no difficulty in the way. "I am separated from the Queen," he wrote to Mademoiselle Doenhof; "Madame d'Ingenheim has left me a widower; I offer you my heart and hand." He made no concealment of it, openly declaring that he had grounds for repudiating the Queen, but he refrained from

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taking action upon them in order to maintain the dignity of the throne.

The Consistory did not require to deliberate a second time ; precedents had been established, and they were followed. The marriage took place on April 10th, 1790, and it was the Court preacher, Zoellner, who consecrated it as he had consecrated that with Mademoiselle de Voss. The Queen gave the bride girandoles of diamonds. The Queen-Dowager received her, and everyone at Court made a fuss of her. All the same, she was no more successful than Mademoiselle de Voss in getting rid of Madame Rietz. This favourite, who had been given 70,000 crowns to take her departure, remained, took an officer as her lover, and even got the King to promote him.

X

And so, in 1790, the King of Prussia, Mademoiselle de Voss's widower, had three wives living : the Princess of Brunswick, who was repudiated ; the Princess of Darmstadt, who, although divorced, still kept the rank of Queen ; and Mademoiselle Doenhof, morganatic wife. This third wife, wrote one diplomat, will not be the last, for " those the King longs for will also want to be married." The Prince in

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any case was always ready. Polygamy, in his eyes, was a prerogative of royalty. As the result of a Court intrigue in 1792 he had himself separated from Mademoiselle Doenhof, crowning by this divorce the strange series of his conjugal evolutions. Then he offered his heart and hand to a lady called Bethmann, a banker's daughter whom he had known at Frankfort, and found very much to his liking. This young person, in the words of Lord Malmesbury, was "all sentiment and all fire"; but she had principles and discretion. She had misgivings about the character of the marriage, and the constancy of the bridegroom. She refused, thus sparing the Berlin casuists the trouble of a deliberation still more ticklish than before. I know not whether these accommodating theologians, reared in the school of Voltaire and Frederick, took these simultaneous marriages very seriously or not; abroad they afforded subject for ridicule, and Catherine the Great, who herself did not feel bound to observe so many formalities, was highly amused at them; "that big lout of a Gu"—such was her name for Frederick-William in her letters to Grimm—"that big lout has just married a third wife; the libertine never has enough legitimate wives; for a conscientious libertine, commend me to him."

XI

Frederick-William loved women. Women, however, did not govern him. But if he escaped the influence of mistresses, he fell under the influence of favourites, and the people were none the better off. Badly brought up, kept apart from State affairs by his uncle, distrusting others because he was very distrustful of himself, he knew nothing of the art of government, and dallied with vague reform projects. The Ministers whom Frederick left behind, although very second-rate, made him ill at ease. He was afraid of being considered under their thumb; besides these Ministers represented ideas and a system which he affected to condemn. "The King will be led just because he is afraid of being so," wrote Mirabeau. The fear of being governed by his Ministers delivered him into the hands of underlings, who promptly gained a mastery over him by humbling themselves before him, reassuring his suspicious pride, flattering his passions, above all, exploiting the shortcomings of his mind. Frederick-William desired the good of the State; he had a hazy but quite keen idea of the necessity of counteracting the excesses of Frederick's government; but his

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intentions. rambled, and his reform fancies, more mystical than political, proceeded not so much from the idea of the interests of the State as from the influence of a secret doctrine with which he was imbued. The statesman in him was but an adept in magic ; for Ministers he took mere charlatans. Skilled conjurers replaced at Potsdam Frederick's "judicious Ministers."

XII

Of all these mystical adventurers the one whose influence was perhaps the most baneful for the Prussian State was Woellner, a pure intriguer. Son of a country pastor, he worked his way into the household of General d'Itzenplitz ; after wheedling the mother, he ended by marrying the daughter. Frederick, who was anything but indulgent to misalliances, had him clapped into prison in Berlin. The hatred of Woellner for the Philosopher-King dated from that day. At that time he was a rationalist and a disciple of Wolf ; he became a Free Mason. But already in high society in Germany the wind no longer set in the direction of pure Deism. Woellner, always a perfect sceptic, changed his convictions. Considering himself as fitted as any other for the apparition

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business and the mystery industry, he decided to turn "honest broker" between the powers of this world and those of the next, basing his credit with the former on that which he claimed with the latter. He joined the Rosicrucians, and soon became one of the leading lights of the Order.

Thus he knew the man who was to counter-balance his favour at the Court of Berlin and one day share with him Frederick's government, the Saxon Bischoffswerder. The son of a small noble, an officer of fortune, come like so many others to seek service in Prussia, he had wormed his way into the favour of the Prince Royal, and had quickly taken him in.

XIII

Mistresses and favourites, Rosicrucians and valets, theosophists and "femme galantes" on the whole got on very well together and agreed surprisingly. It was but a step from the laboratory of the Rosicrucians to the boudoir of Madame Rietz, and these mystic personages cleared it without a scrap of shame. They formed a close alliance with the valet de chambre and his wife, the "maîtresse d'habitude," who throughout all the matri-

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monial pranks of the King managed to preserve her credit by artifices analogous to those which at Versailles had so long maintained that of Madame de Pompadour.

Around them swarmed a crowd of subordinate intriguers, the "clique," as they were called in Berlin, ready for all sorts of jobs behind the scenes at Court, in the Army, in politics, in diplomacy, above all in finance. Needy and greedy, they had a firmly established reputation in Europe for venality. "I maintain," declared Mirabeau, "that with a thousand louis you could, if need be, know perfectly all the secrets of the Berlin Cabinet. . . . So the Emperor has a faithful record of every step of the King, day by day, and could know everything he planned, if he planned anything." These were the methods, as Custine affirmed in 1792, that every diplomatist in the world employed; all the Ministers who resided in Berlin used them with more success and more generally than elsewhere.

XIV

Such was the strange band of adventurers who pounced on the monarchy and the treasury of Frederick the Great. Their course of action,

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very complex and very powerful, was well designed to captivate a fantastic and voluptuous bigot. However, they would never have gained more than an ante-chamber or alcove influence, they would never have risen to political influence had they not known how to pervert the noblest inclinations of the King, whilst flattering the lowest. Mediocre and secondary as was his place in the line of the Hohenzollerns, Frederick-William was not devoid of all royal qualities. We was brave, he was kindhearted, or rather he was a man of "sensibility"; he desired the public weal; he had suffered, like the nation, from the pitiless régime of Frederick; like the whole nation he wanted to reform the State by lightening the yoke. He believed himself inspired from on high, "illuminated," and called by Providence to restore the morals and faith of a country which, he was told, and he himself believed, was perishing through the scepticism of men's minds and the looseness of men's morals.

How could he combine such tendencies with such tastes, such aspirations with such passions, such beliefs with such debauchery? It was just therein that he showed himself a weak character and a mystic; that was why he joined theurgic sects instead of submitting to the Church; why he believed in visions more

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than in the Gospel, listened to a ventriloquist mimicing the voice of Frederick instead of listening to the voices of the Ministers, the great King's disciples; that is why he distrusted wise, thoughtful, experienced people and surrendered himself to charlatans and favourites.

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